

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. A method for operating a client device that is configured for communications via a
2 communications network, comprising:

4 effecting an advertisement download communication link between the client device
and an advertisement distribution server system, via the communications network, at selected
advertisement download times;

6 effecting a data communication link with a data communications service provider, via
the communications network, wherein the advertisement download communication link and
8 the data communication link are separate communication links;

10 downloading advertisements from the advertisement distribution server system via the
advertisement download communication link;

12 storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client
device; and

14 displaying at least selected ones of the stored advertisements, in accordance with ad
display parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system.

2. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:

2 the method is implemented by software installed on the client device; and
the advertisement distribution server system is controlled by a vendor of the software.

3. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the communications network
2 comprises the Internet.

4. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the software is subsidized by revenues
2 attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

5. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters include at
2 least one of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that
4 it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;
and

10 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

6. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the ad display parameters include at
2 least one of the following:

the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time that it
4 is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be displayed;
and

10 the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be displayed.

7. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters include at
2 least two of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that
4 it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;
and

10 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

8. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the ad display parameters include at least two of the following:

the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be displayed;

the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be displayed; and

the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be displayed.

9. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisements include main screen advertisements and toolbar advertisements.

10. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the advertisements include main screen advertisements and toolbar advertisements.

11. The method as set forth in Claim 9, wherein the ad display parameters associated with each of the toolbar advertisements include:

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

12. The method as set forth in Claim 10, wherein the ad display parameters include the following parameters associated with each of the toolbar advertisements:

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

13. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the step of displaying at least

2 selected ones of the stored advertisements comprises displaying the at least selected ones of
the stored advertisements in a linear manner.

14. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the step of displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements comprises displaying the at least selected ones of
the stored advertisements in a random manner.

15. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the step of displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements comprises displaying the at least selected ones of
the stored advertisements in a linear sequence according to the order in which the
4 advertisements are stored on the storage medium.

16. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the step of displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements comprises displaying the at least selected ones of
the stored advertisements in an order prescribed by the advertisement distribution server
4 system.

17. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the ad display parameters are
2 prescribed by a vendor of the software.

18. The method as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising a step of monitoring user
2 activity, wherein:

at least one of the ad display parameters is a face time duration parameter that
4 specifies a face time duration for at least one of the stored advertisements;

the step of displaying at least selected ones of the stored advertisements comprises
6 displaying the at least one of the stored advertisements for the face time duration prescribed
by the associated face time duration parameter; and

8 the face time duration comprises a time period during which at least a prescribed
minimum level of user activity is detected.

19. The method as set forth in Claim 18, wherein the user activity comprises any user
2 action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

20. The method as set forth in Claim 18, wherein the user activity comprises any user
2 action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen associated with the client device.

21. The method as set forth in Claim 18, wherein the user activity comprises any of
2 the following user actions:

movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
4 use of an input device associated with the client device.

22. The method as set forth in 18, wherein the user activity comprises any of the
2 following user actions:

movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
4 clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client device.

23. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
2 for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, how many
times that advertisement is to be displayed for a given time period, and how long that
4 advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed.

24. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
2 for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, how many
times that advertisement is to be displayed for a given time period.

25. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
2 for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, how long that
advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed.

26. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, a start
date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed, and the end
date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

27. The method as set forth in Claim 23, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
for each of the prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, a start
date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed, and the end
date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

28. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, the
total/cumulative amount of time that advertisement is to be displayed.

29. The method as set forth in Claim 23, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
for each of the prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, the
total/cumulative amount of time that advertisement is to be displayed.

30. The method as set forth in Claim 27, wherein the ad display parameters specify,
for each of the prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, the
total/cumulative amount of time that advertisement is to be displayed.

31. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters include
any one or more of the following parameters for each advertisement to be displayed:

a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time
that it is displayed;

a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;
the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

and

10 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;
wherein the face time comprises a time period during which a prescribed minimum
12 level of user activity occurs.

32. The method as set forth in Claim 31, further comprising a step of monitoring user
2 activity to detect whether the prescribed minimum level of user activity has occurred.

33. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the step of downloading
2 advertisements comprises downloading advertisements identified in at least one playlist
generated by at least one playlist server.

34. The method as set forth in Claim 33, further comprising:
2 generating a cookie containing information describing user/client device behavior
and/or user demographics; and
4 transmitting the cookie to the at least one playlist server.

35. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters include
2 any one or more of the following parameters for each advertisement to be displayed:
a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time
4 that it is displayed; and
a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;
6 wherein the face time comprises a time period during which a prescribed minimum
level of user activity occurs.

36. The method as set forth in Claim 35, further comprising a step of monitoring user
2 activity to detect whether the prescribed minimum level of user activity has occurred.

37. The method as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the user activity comprises any user
2 action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

38. The method as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the user activity comprises any user
2 action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen associated with the client device.

39. The method as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the user activity comprises any of
2 the following user actions:

movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
4 use of an input device associated with the client device.

40. The method as set forth in 35, wherein the user activity comprises any of the
2 following user actions:

movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
4 clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client device.

41. The method as set forth in Claim 33, wherein the at least one playlist is
2 customized to the user/client device.

42. The method as set forth in Claim 33, wherein the at least one playlist is tailored to
2 the user/client device.

43. The method as set forth in claim 34, wherein the at least one playlist is generated
2 by the at least one playlist server for the user/client device based at least partially on the
information contained in the cookie.

44. The method as set forth in Claim 33, wherein the at least one playlist is generated
2 by the at least one playlist server based at least partially on user demographics and/or
user/client device behavior.

45. The method as set forth in Claim 33, wherein:
2 the method is implemented by software installed on the client device; and

the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software.

46. The method as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the software is e-mail software.

47. The method as set forth in Claim 45, wherein the software is e-mail software

48. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the data communications service
2 provider is an e-mail service provider.

49. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the data communications service
2 provider is an Internet service provider.

50. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the step of displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements comprises displaying the at least selected ones of
the stored advertisements when the client device is offline.

51. A method for operating a client device that is configured for communications via
2 a communications network, comprising:

effecting an advertisement download communication link between the client device
4 and an advertisement distribution server system, via the communications network, at selected
advertisement download times;

6 effecting a data communication link with a data communications service provider, via
the communications network, wherein the advertisement download communication link and
8 the data communication link are separate communication links;

10 downloading advertisements from the advertisement distribution server system via the
advertisement download communication link;

12 storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client
device; and

14 displaying at least selected ones of the stored advertisements, in accordance with ad
display parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system,

wherein:

the method is implemented by software installed on the client device;

the advertisement distribution server system is controlled by a vendor of the software;

the communications network comprises the Internet; and

the ad display parameters include at least one of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed; and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.